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ASSYRIAN ELEMENTS IN THE PERSEUS-GORGON STORY

THERE are several references to the Gorgon in Homer though, as Furtwängler¹ points out, representations of the monster in art do not occur until after the Geometric period. In the *Iliad*, Athena is represented (V, 738 ff) as throwing about her shoulders the tasselled aegis circled with Fear, and adorned with Strife, Courage, chill Rout and the Gorgon head of the terrible monster (ἐν δέ τε Γοργείη κεφαλὴ δεινοῖο πελώρου — δεινὴ τε σμερδνὴ τε, Διὸς τέρας αἰγυόχοιο). A somewhat similar representation was in the mind of the poet when he described the shield of Agamemnon with Terror and Fear apparently circling the head of the Gorgon (τῇ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν Γοργῷ βλοσυρῶπις — δεινὸν δερκομένη, περὶ δὲ Δεῖμός τε Φόβος τε ἐστεφάνωτο, XI, 36). The terrifying glance of Hector is once compared to that of the Gorgon or man-slaying Ares (Γοργοῦς ὄμματ' ἔχων ἥδὲ βροτολουργοῦ Ἄρης, VIII, 349). In the *Odyssey* the mere thought of the Gorgon head is enough to furnish Odysseus with a chill of fear. "And cold terror seized me," he says, "lest revered Persephone send up from Hades the Gorgon — head of the terrible monster." (ἐμέ δὲ χλωρόν δέος ἤρει — μή μοι Γοργεῖην κεφαλὴν δεινοῖο πελώρου — ἐξ Ἀΐδος πέμψειεν ἀγανὴ Περσεφόνεια, XI, 633).

One remarks at once that in all four of these passages it is the glance or look of the Gorgon which seems of special significance; and that no attention is paid to the body. Twice the head alone is referred to explicitly, once it is merely the eyes; on the shield of Agamemnon an adjective for the face alone is given, the glance is stressed, the representation is circled with the figures of Terror and Fear. Certainly here again we have only the head so often represented on shields of later warriors. In addition to the emphasis thrown on the head alone, we learn from these references that it belonged to a terrible monster, that the eye or the glance was the most terrifying feature, that the face was already portrayed on the Aegis of Athena and acknowledged to be a sign of Zeus who also bore the aegis. It has been well remarked in this connection that the representation of the head is certainly considered to be always full front for only so would the power of eyes and glance be adequately given. Curiously enough from the name Gorgo itself, our only other evidence in this early period, we have the emphasis thrown on another feature, the voice, for it is with the Sanscrit "garj" to shriek, and the Greek *θόρυβος* that the root is usually connected. This seems the more strange when we consider that in Greek literature generally, though the Gorgon's sisters may shriek in pursuing Perseus, from the most famous of the three we hear no sound. She does not appear in story until she is attacked by Perseus. The sleep in which he finds her is only broken by death.

It is no doubt the vagueness of these first references and the great difficulty of linking them all together into one satisfactory whole that has led to so many different theories of the origin of the Gorgon. Ziegler in Pauly-Wissowa (VII, pp. 1645 ff.) gives an excellent summary of the hypotheses advanced before 1912: the various attempts to see the original Medusa in such natural phenomena as volcanic eruption, the ocean's roar, the sea waves, etc., the connection of the Medusa-head with

¹ Roscher's *Lexicon*, pp. 1695-1727.

the ghost-like character of the full moon, first developed by Gädechens; Roscher's famous theory of the Gorgons as thunder-clouds; the theory of Ridgeway, which Miss Harrison follows, that the Gorgoneion was the actual head of a hideous beast indigenous to the Libyan desert; and K. O. Müller's hypothesis that the Gorgon figure was the personification of an idea in which the chief elements were anger, rage and scorn. We might smile now at the hypotheses which saw the original Medusa in the ape, the gorilla or the countenance of the octopus, were it not for the fact that most recently a scholar armed with the modern weapon of psychology has advanced the vision of a nightmare as the prototype of the Gorgon head.¹ Dreams, however, are based at least in part on fact and it would not be difficult for the older adherents of the zoölogical origin to reassert their theory with the dream as medium between the terrifying appearance of octopus or gorilla and Gorgon head.

We may for convenience divide these theories into two groups, one seeking the origin of the Gorgon in natural phenomena, the other in actual zoölogical specimens or in animals of the imagination derived from these. When from these hypotheses, however, we glance back to the evidence of Homer, difficulties are at once apparent. Why should only the head of an animal be portrayed, and never a mention made of arms or claws? How did such an animal obtain the human head? Why should it be especially connected with Athena and Zeus? Finally in its connection with these divinities why is it only the head, never the Gorgon as a whole which is mentioned? Practically the same objections may be made to the origin in natural phenomena. Zeus to be sure is connected with the storm but why should Athena so constantly wear the Gorgon's head and so little employ the thunderbolt? Why in this particular case should the Greeks depart from their usual habit of depicting nature gods as full grown beings and portray only the head? Is it not most curious that whether the Gorgon head was originally volcano, or storm cloud, or roaring sea, it should possess in Homer only a head, apparently, moreover, so inanimate a thing as a head severed from the body? And is it not curious that the severed head of a terrible enemy should be used for protection and defence by Athena and Zeus?

Under this battery of questions it is perhaps easier to adopt the recent solution of Nilsson who follows Hartland² in relegating the whole story to the category of folk-tale the origin of which is lost in the indefinite past. Speaking of the Perseus-Gorgon story Nilsson says,³ "The most prominent hero of Mycenae in the earlier generation is Perseus. The kernel of his myth is the slaying of the monster Gorgo, and is perhaps the best instance of a folk-tale received into Greek heroic mythology." On the same page he explains the more definite details added by the Greeks. "The myth of Perseus," he writes, "is unusually crowded with folk-tale motifs and this is in some measure a proof of high antiquity. Folk-tales are told in all countries everywhere and they are not localized by other peoples. In Greece, however, they were localized because of the innate tendency of heroic mythology to localize its heroes, and because the folk-tale was preserved only when it was received into the

¹ H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, London 1928, pp. 29-30.

² E. S. Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, I-III 1894-6.

³ M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, University of California Press, 1932, p. 40.

heroic mythology." On the one hand, however, this explanation only avoids the question of origin by throwing it further back into the past, and on the other hand offers no reason why a certain folk tale should be attached to a certain hero at a particular time. Nor does it seek to explain the development and changes in the Gorgon itself or the Perseus-Gorgon story as a whole. One is therefore rather challenged by these hypotheses to review the question afresh, than to rest satisfied with such solutions.

Nor can we accept unreservedly the opinion that the Perseus-Gorgon story was already known in Mycenaean times because the Gorgon was known to Homer, Perseus was recognized as a hero by the poet, and because the fabric of the Gorgon-slaying episode is perhaps very old and widespread. Homer, as we have seen, mentions the Gorgon four times; he mentions the name of Perseus three times, twice when he merely calls Sthenelos Perseus' son (Περσηϊάδης, *Il.*, XIX, 116 and 123); once when Zeus relates to Hera in that extremely doubtful passage the love he once had for Danae, "who bore Perseus, outstanding among heroes." (ἡ τέκε Περσῆα, πάντων ἀριδείκετον ἀνδρῶν, *Il.*, XIV, 319). In view of the later great popularity of the Perseus-Gorgon story it seems at least curious that Homer would not mention the incident if it were either current in his own day or a tradition handed down from Mycenaean times.

The theory that it was the Gorgon's head, not the Perseus-Gorgon story that was foremost, at first seems borne out by the evidence of the representations in art. To be sure we have no representations at all in the Mycenaean or geometric periods, but the first representations we have depict the head alone. Payne in his excellent treatise on Corinthian pottery gives an analysis of the development of Gorgon types.¹ The first of the series goes back and far back, he says, into the Protocorinthian period, certainly to the time before the middle of the seventh century B.C. This is the representation of a Gorgon's head on the back of a lion protome. The handle ornament of Gorgon head on the Macmillan lekythos and the shield device of Gorgon on the aryballos from Gela both date from the middle of the seventh century. A second shield device on the Chigi oinochoe is slightly later. It is not until we come to the Thermon metopes dating perhaps from the transitional period 640/35—620/15 that we see either the complete figure of the Gorgon or any representation of Perseus and the Gorgon together.

When the Thermon metopes were painted, however, the whole story of the slaying by Perseus was known, for one of the metopes portrayed a Gorgon in pursuit of Perseus.² A clay plaque from Syracuse of almost the same period portrays the kneeling Gorgon with the winged Pegasus under her arm. It is, as Payne remarks, on Corinthian paintings of the kind represented at Thermon that the brilliant description of the pursuit of Perseus by the Gorgon is clearly based.³ From Hesiod we have not only the story of the slaying of the Gorgon by Perseus but also the account of the birth of Chrysaor and Pegasus from the neck of the slain monster.⁴

Yet this transition from the head alone, as given in the early art and story, to the

¹ Humfry Payne, *Necrocorinthia*, Oxford 1931, p. 80.

² *Antike Denkmäler*, 11, pl. 52; Payne *B.S.A.* 1925-6, p. 127.

³ Pseudo-Hesiod, *Shield of Herakles*, 216 ff.

⁴ Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 280-1.

figure of the monster suggested by Hesiod, and depicted so often in Corinthian and later Greek art types, appears to have been by no means simple. Proof of this in ancient times is afforded by the many different representations of the Gorgon's body in the seventh century, and at present by the startling differences of opinion among modern scholars about the origin of the Gorgon type, due certainly to these varying interpretations in early art. On the famous plate from Kamiros, the Gorgon's head is apparently placed on the shoulders of the nature-goddess of Asia Minor:¹ the late geometric vase from Boeotia represented the Gorgon as a centaur.² Many and various are the fantastic Gorgon types from Italy. The heads themselves in this early period are sometimes bearded, sometimes not. Some representations have horns or beast ears, some neither. The snakes apparently are a later development appearing first in the Thermon metope.

Furtwängler explained the early bearded Gorgon heads as a logical development from an originally male demon-mask. Frothingham in 1911 advanced the theory, based on the interpretation of the Kamiros plate, that the Gorgon is to be identified with a form of the great mother goddess of Asia Minor, especially Artemis.³ Most common at present is the belief that the type arose in Syria or Cyprus influenced by Egyptian representations of the god Bes. Six⁴ believed the Greek form originated in Cyprus from Phoenician models of an originally Egyptian type. Furtwängler (Roscher's *Lexicon*, Vol. III, 2, pp. 1986 ff.) distinguishes two principal Greek forms, one arising from Hittite art types in Asia Minor, the other from Phoenician adaptations of Egyptian Bes. More recently, however, Pettazzoni following Ohnefalsch-Richter has sought to trace the origins back to the representations of the Egyptian goddess Hathor,⁵ while the claims of Asia Minor especially for the origin of the kneeling type of Medusa found on the Corfu pediment are supported by Eduard Meyer in his volume on the Hittites.⁶ Payne believes that though the Egyptian or Syrian origin of the Gorgon figure is a possibility, the representations should be considered as a Greek invention since through Greek artists the Gorgon received an entirely individual character.⁷

It seems perfectly clear from so many original variations allowing such wide differences in interpretation, that there had been in the seventh century no commonly recognized form of the story in legend and art. To account for this fact there can, I believe, be only one explanation, a solution furnished by the evidence of Homer and the earliest representations in art. In the earliest period, the Mycenaean age, and the geometric epoch, the head alone of the Gorgon monster was known both in story and in art. In the seventh century, therefore, when artists began to attempt the whole body they were free to fasten the head on any type of body they preferred, and they used this freedom with eagerness. Later on the Corinthian types were recognized as the best interpretations and these were then universally adopted.

¹ *J.H.S.* VI, 1885, pp. 278 ff.

² *B.C.H.* XXII, 1898, Pl. 5.

³ *A.J.A.* XV, 1911, pp. 349 ff.

⁴ J. Six, *De Gorgone*, 1885, p. 94.

⁵ Ohnefalsch-Richter, *L'Imagerie phénicienne et la mythologie iconologique chez les Grecs*, pp. 128 ff; Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Bollettino d'Arte*, Serie II, 1, 1921-22, pp. 491 ff; cf. Alda Levi, *Bollettino d'Arte*, Serie II, V, 1925-6, pp. 124 ff.

⁶ E. Meyer, *Reich und Kultur der Chetiter*, Berlin 1914, Fig. 83, pp. 113-14 and notes.

⁷ H. Payne, *Necrocorinthia*, Oxford 1931, pp. 79 ff.

If our reasoning is correct, therefore, we may conclude that before the seventh century only the head of the Gorgon was known, that during the last half of that century the body was first represented and the story of the slaying of the Gorgon by Perseus first introduced. One suspects that some new influence, a force from outside, must have contributed to cause the sudden and immense popularity of this famous tale.

In the seventh century the Assyrian Empire was dominant in the East. Assyrian influence was, however, no new feature in western Asia, for ever since the great Ashurnasirpal's reign in the first half of the ninth century, Assyria had had no great rival in the East and generally controlled the western countries of Palestine and Syria. If the Assyrian forces had not come into direct contact with the Greeks before, through their enterprises in Phoenicia and Cyprus, at least the two peoples met when Sennacherib invaded Cilicia in 698 B.C. It was, however, under the great Ashurbanipal, 669-26, that Assyria seemed to reach the apex of its strength and prosperity. Egypt was prostrate; other eastern powers except Elam were unable to offer resistance and Elam herself was about to capitulate. Still more interesting it is to see that just at this time, during the reign of Ashurbanipal, Assyrian art advances with great strides and for the first time exerts a direct and powerful influence on the Greek artistic development. The technique which Assyrian artists possessed in the portrayal of animal forms, as exhibited in the marvellous reliefs of lions and wild horses from the palace of Ashurbanipal, has rarely if ever been excelled. But it is just characteristic features of this new style which appear now for the first time and with sudden prominence in Greek drawings. It was pointed out some time ago that the change in horse representations as exhibited on Corinthian vessels can be traced back to the new Assyrian movement.¹ The solid incised rosette, "hall-mark" of the early Corinthian orientalizing style in the last quarter of the seventh century, is a design most common on Assyrian dress patterns. Payne traces the influence further, citing the new and favorite Corinthian floral complex which develops from an Assyrian motive, and the introduction of four-winged monsters common in Assyrian art.² Particularly striking is the change at this time of Greek lion types for it reflects the difference between the Assyrian and the Hittite. "It is scarcely an exaggeration to say," Payne declares, "that wherever the Corinthian type shows an advance on the Protocorinthian, it reflects the progress of the Assyrian type beyond the Hittite."

It can be then, I believe, no mere coincidence that Assyrian art brings us a demon resembling the Greek Gorgon much more closely in many respects than does the Egyptian Bes, and Assyrian tradition a most striking parallel to the Perseus-Gorgon story. This is, of course, the figure of Humbaba and the story of his death at the hands of Gilgamesh. Eduard Meyer³ remarks that he knows of only two figures besides the Gorgon in ancient art, which are regularly portrayed full face: Gilgamesh with related figures in Babylonian art, and the Egyptian god Bes. He overlooks the fact, however, that Humbaba is not only never represented except full-

¹ Lieres u. Wilchau, *Zur Pferdedarstellung*, p. 71.

² H. Payne, *Necrocorinthia*, p. 69 and pp. 53 ff.

³ E. Meyer, *Reich und Kultur der Chetiter*, Berlin 1914, pp. 113-14, especially note 2.

face but most commonly only by the head alone with lack even of a suggestion of neck. The portraits of Humbaba have not the protruding tongue of the Gorgon and of Bes but they do have always the grimacing mouth with the two rows of teeth fully exposed. Even more than the early Gorgon portraits they stressed the wrinkles of the face, for the countenance was commonly drawn in a single line to bring out its likeness to the entrails of a sheep. Meyer points to Hittite art as the prototype for the half-kneeling running position of the Gorgon figures. This "knielaufen," however, was probably taken over by the Hittites from Babylonia, and we find the position very much more common in Assyrian than in Hittite art. It is in the Mesopotamian valley that we obtain the explanation of the position, probably first portraying simply the intensity of the struggle,¹ later the suggestion of quick motion.

In Assyrian legend Humbaba played a most interesting rôle. To guard the cedars of the forest and to terrify human beings, the God Bel had destined Humbaba. His voice is like a tempest, his mouth like that of the gods and his breath a wind. Especially under his protection is the sanctuary of Irmini (Ishtar), a part of the forest of cedars in which he dwells.² Another version of the epic describes his cry as a hurricane, his mouth, fire, his breath, death. He was a raging being whose might was irresistible.³ He was not always, however, a raging destructive force. Sidney Smith describes him as a minor deity who acted as Tammuz's guardian over evil spirits and might be beneficent or malevolent like other beings of this order, e.g., the šedu.⁴ In a text quoted by Thureau-Dangin (*Revue d'Assyriologie*, 22, 1925, p. 26), this aspect is clearly revealed, for the dedicant calls in the following words on Tammuz to bring in his voyage to the country of the dead, the evil spirit which persecutes him, "To the powerful Humbaba, the demon who does not pardon, confide him, that he may be separated from me." Humbaba has then, as Thureau-Dangin remarks, become as Pazuzu, a tame demon whose face has a protective virtue.

It is veritably astonishing how well these characteristics fulfill the requirements laid down in Homer and the elements carried through the later tradition. The demon has a very direct connection with the great goddess through the protection of her sanctuary. His face has a protective virtue especially against evil spirits, a symbol, therefore, which would be most appropriately placed on shield and aegis. His voice is a tempest, his cry, the hurricane, his breath, death. Surely the derivation of Gorgo from "garj" could not have a more natural cause. The eyes are not especially mentioned but the whole countenance of the demon himself is irresistible and brings death. Possibly an echo of his connection with the land of the dead we may see in the fear of Odysseus that the Gorgon's head may be sent up from Hades. It is worth remark at least that the head which remains above on the aegis of Athena and Zeus should also be guardian of the region below.

The story of the killing of Humbaba by Gilgamesh and his faithful companion Enkidou is too well known to be repeated here. There are, however, certain points which should be mentioned. Gilgamesh and his friend accomplished three great

¹ Hugo Prinz, *Altorientalische Symbolik*, Berlin, 1915, p. 113.

² P. Dhorme, *Textes religieux Assyro-Babyloniens*, Paris, 1907, p. 229, Col. V, 1.

³ Jastrow and Clay, *Old Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*.

⁴ *Annals of Archaeology* (University of Liverpool) 1924, p. 108.

tasks: the slaying of Humbaba, the killing of the celestial bull, and the destruction of the lions. The quest of Humbaba carries them to most distant lands and is apparently, to judge from the length of the description, the most dangerous and difficult task of all. It forms the principal refrain in their songs of triumph, "We have killed Humbaba who lived in the forest of cedars."¹ The wandering hero, performer of many great deeds, slays the demon power, and thereafter we see in art the representations of the head alone, the hideous mask of the monster. Certainly the parallel between this account and the story of Perseus' victory over the Gorgon could not be overlooked. Moreover the Humbaba account, as the central episode in the Gilgamesh story, is just the story which we should expect to be carried to the West. Gilgamesh was the great hero of the Babylonians, the story of his deeds makes the subject of the great Babylonian epic. The poem naturally passed to the Assyrians and the popularity of the story increased rather than waned. So great was its renown and so widespread its popularity that in the archives of Bogaz Keui in central Asia Minor fragments of the legend have been found. (See J. Friedrich, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXXIX, 6-15 and A. Ungnad, "Das hurritische Fragment des Gilgamesch-Epos," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXXV, pp. 133 ff.) And interestingly enough, it was from the library of Ashurbanipal that the chief tablets of our texts were recovered. Fragments of four different copies of the same tablet in the library of Ashurbanipal attest its immense popularity. Surely if Assyrian art in the reign of Ashurbanipal should so strikingly affect Greek art we should confidently expect to find echoes of the great Assyrian-Babylonian hero.

There was, moreover, a special reason why the story should have a vogue in Syria, for it was there that the home of Humbaba was located. Possibly originally, as Dhorme believes, Humbaba belonged to Elam.² Clay, however, has made out a very strong case for the belief that Humbaba belonged to the Amorites and that the Lebanon forest was his original home.³ It is pretty generally believed now that the great cedar forests referred to lay in Syria, though opinion is divided between Mount Amanus, a spur of the Taurus in north Syria, and the Lebanons.⁴ Certainly to the Assyrians in the time of Ashurbanipal mention of a great stretch of cedar forest could only have meant that in the Syrian west. Even in Greek times, the name of Humbaba seems to have survived in Syria, for in the legends recorded by Lucian of the founding of the shrine of the great Syrian goddess at Hieropolis we have Combabos, as the principal hero.⁵

As to the route of the Assyrian legend to Greece, it was of course logically through Cyprus and Syria that the story proceeded. Indication of its passage through this region and additional proof of its Assyrian origin may perhaps be seen in the

¹ Dhorme, *Textes religieux*, p. 293, Col. V, 1, 10; p. 263, Col. V, 1, a, line 6, etc.

² P. Dhorme, *op. cit.* p. 219, note 14.

³ A. T. Clay, *The Empire of the Amorites*, Yale Press 1919, pp. 87 ff. Cf. *The Origin of Biblical Tradition*, Yale Press 1923, pp. 41, 57 and 88.

⁴ Gressmann, *Gilgamesh Epos*, pp. 111 ff. Cf. S. Smith in *Annals of Archaeology*, II, 1929, pp. 108-9; Ch. Virolleaud, "La Montagne des Cèdres dans les traditions de l'ancien Orient," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CI, No. 1, 1930.

⁵ Lucian, *De dea Syria*, 19 ff. Cf. Dhorme, *op. cit.* p. 217, note 7 and Harmon's note in the Loeb Series, Lucian Vol. IV, p. 366, note 1.

provenance of the harpé, the weapon which replaced the sword as the characteristic armor of Perseus. The harpé was a very old instrument and a very popular one in the ancient East. Petrie has already traced its movement to Egypt from its original home in Chaldea.¹ Harpés appear on some of the Hittite monuments;² one was discovered in a grave at Gezer;³ they were apparently the royal weapon of the early kings of Byblos⁴ and they were most popular on Babylonian-Assyrian monuments. The famous statue of Ashurnasirpal in the British Museum shows the king holding a sickle-shaped harpé in his right hand.⁵ In the Louvre, an eighth century statue from the palace of Sargon portrays a hero holding a clawing lion under one arm and the long, slightly curved harpé in the other. The monument is described as a representation of Gilgamesh or the Assyrian Herakles. This last monument is of especial interest, for, as opposed to the monuments of Asia Minor and Egypt, the weapon is actually used against a foe, not employed merely as symbol or attribute of royal powers. The harpé or scimitar is in fact the characteristic weapon of Marduk on Babylonian seals especially in representations of his fight with the dragon Tiamat. In Assyrian art, the god fighting an ostrich, or a fantastic creature representing either Tiamat or the spirit of disorder, most commonly attacks with the harpé. The hero, therefore, of any Greek story influenced by Assyrian tradition might be expected to carry this weapon, especially if he were contending with a monster. It is no surprise, then, to find that Herakles or his companion is sometimes armed with



FIG. 1.—FACE OF
HUMBABA

(Courtesy of the
British Museum)

the sickle-shaped sword in his fight against the Hydra and the Crab. A vase in the Berlin Museum shows Herakles with sickle-shaped sword, Iolaos, with a torch in each hand. On a representation from Aegina it is Iolaos who has the harpé. Herakles bears the curved sword again on a vase in Paris, and it is the sickle which he carries in a small statue group from Cyprus.⁶ The Assyrian influence, therefore, which laid such great stress at this time on the harpé as weapon against the powers of evil, is strong enough to affect even the legends of Herakles, especially on the island of Cyprus. In the Perseus-Gorgon story that influence is still stronger so that the curved sword becomes the regular weapon of the hero. Once more we feel that the analogy of the

Greek story to the Assyrian legends was very strongly founded in tradition.

Another aspect of the Humbaba tradition in Babylonia and Assyria has recently been brought to light. Characteristic of representations of the face of the demon is the single raised line with which it is drawn. It is the weaving about of this line which makes the mask a mass of wrinkles and which brings to the countenance the resemblance to sheep-entrails occasionally mentioned in the texts (Fig. 1). Sidney Smith is quite right in stating, therefore, that until further evidence is forthcoming

¹ Sir F. Petrie, *Tools and Weapons*.

² J. Garstang, *The Land of the Hittites*, London, 1910, pls. LXIX and LXXV. Cf. *Syria*, X, 1929, p. 7.

³ Macalister, *Gezer*, III, pls. LXXIV-LXXV.

⁴ *Syria* VII, 1926, pp. 253 ff.

⁵ Nimrud collection. E. Wallis Budge, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum*, London, 1914, pl. I.

⁶ For a review of these monuments see, A. C. Merriam, "Hercules, Hydra and Crab," in *Classical Studies in Honor of Henry Drisler*, New York, 1894, pp. 218 ff.

it is more than doubtful whether any object of the late period (after 1000 B.C.) is intended to represent Humbaba unless that characteristic feature, the single line, belongs to it. All we know, he states, about the representation of Humbaba is summed up in that.¹ Thureau-Dangin, however, has recently contended that the category of Humbaba representations must be expanded to include certain terracotta masks and relief statuettes which represent a broad-faced demon whose lips are drawn back to reveal the teeth, and from whose nose S-shaped twisted tufts hang down to below the chin.² The face, though it does not contain the omen-lines of the Humbaba masks, is otherwise not unlike the Humbaba representations (Fig. 2). It may be said in support of his contention also that this type of mask with prominent teeth and thick ridged lines of the rictus around the mouth and over the nose is most common and occurs very frequently, just as do the single line representations, without any suggestion of neck (Fig. 3). Eight examples were found in Babylon where they were fastened by bronze nails to the heads of tombs; Thureau-Dangin mentions having seen several in the hands of a dealer³ and Mrs. Van Buren collected ten in her catalogue of clay figurines.⁴ Very recently Opitz has published a very interesting little clay relief which, he believes, represents the death of Humbaba.⁵



FIG. 2.—BABYLONIAN DEMON

(Courtesy of Yale Babylonian Collection)
Y. B. C. 10.027



FIG. 3.—BABYLONIAN DEMON

(Courtesy of Yale Babylonian Collection)
Y. B. C. 10.066

As the photograph shows (Fig. 4), the relief portrays a monster kneeling on the ground and attacked on the one side by a hero armed with a dagger, and on the other by an opponent brandishing an axe and supported by another figure behind. The monster gradually falling beneath the weight of the onslaught has long hair, part of which is grasped by his adversary on the right, up-standing ears, arms which end in the paws of an animal, and legs completed with the claws of a bird. His countenance is grimacing, broad and represented *en face*. From the nose and upper cheeks S-shaped tufts of hair hang down to below the chin. He is clad in a dress without shoulder band reaching from the breast to the upper thigh. From evidence as to the arrangement as a whole, the weapons

¹ S. Smith, "The Face of Humbaba," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1926, pp. 440-2.

² F. Thureau-Dangin, "Humbaba," *Revue d'Assyriologie*, 22, 1925, pp. 24-26.

³ F. Thureau-Dangin, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴ E. Douglas Van Buren, *Clay Figurines of Babylonia and Assyria*, Yale University, 1931, pp. 216-17, Nos. 1047-56.

⁵ D. Opitz, "Der Tod des Humbaba," *Archiv für Orient-Forschung*, 5, 1928-9, pp. 207 ff.

of the victorious warriors and their dress, Opitz makes a very strong case for the theory that the scene is actually a representation of the death of Humbaba.

To the identification of the demon on Opitz's relief with Humbaba, there is, however, a very great and, I am afraid, insuperable difficulty, for the figure on the Babylonian plaque corresponds very closely to representations of the wind-demon Pazuzu. Langdon¹ in his recent volume on Semitic mythology describes this monster as a four-winged demon with half-human, half-canine head and wide, grinning mouth. When one reads further that his hands were those of a savage wild animal



FIG. 4.—DEATH OF DEMON (HUMBABA)

(Courtesy of Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Vorderasiatische Abteilung. V. A. F. 246)

and that the legs terminated in the talons of a bird of prey, one sees at once how near we are to the representation on Opitz's relief. Even the further details of legs covered with feathers and a scorpion tail would not serve to sever the plaque entirely from the Pazuzu category, especially with the present far-from-clear representation that we possess.

If we admit, however, that Opitz's demon belongs to the category of Pazuzu rather than Humbaba representations, then we must refuse to accept Thureau-Dangin's heads with grimacing countenance and S-shaped tufts of hair as belonging to a purely Humbaba group, for these obviously have the same features as the demon of Opitz. Both the plaque published by Thureau-Dangin and a plaque of the same type published by Mrs. Van Buren show the similarities at once. Our photograph shows the latter (Fig. 2), one of the figurines of the Yale Babylonian collection, a figure characterized by protruding ears, squinting eyes with sharply incised lids and gaping mouth with rows of teeth tightly clenched. Thick ridges are portrayed around the mouth and across the nose, ending in spirals curving outward below the chin. The raised right arm ends in a lion's paw instead of a hand. We

¹ S. H. Langdon, *Mythology of All Races*, Vol. V, p. 371.

should, therefore, stand on very uncertain ground if we based the transposition of the Humbaba art-type to Greece on such evidence.

Nevertheless, though one may not accept their conclusions, the studies of these two scholars are of great interest for our investigation of the relationship between the Humbaba and the Gorgon tradition. In the first place, the figures of Thureau-Dangin and Opitz are not far distant from early Gorgon types in Greece, a fact which requires some explanation. Secondly, their researches have revealed the difficulty of finding a distinct class of full figures belonging to the Humbaba group or of scenes representing Humbaba's struggle with Gilgamesh. As far as our present evidence goes, the Greeks of the seventh century would have experienced the same difficulty if they had insisted on obtaining a class of full figures and battle-scenes representing solely and simply Humbaba and his struggle with Gilgamesh. While, however, the relief of Opitz approaches Greek representations of the Gorgon-Perseus story, it does not differ materially from the large class of Assyrian reliefs representing the struggle of hero against demon. It is worth while considering the possibility, therefore, that the Greek, reflecting in the Perseus-Gorgon legend the struggle of Gilgamesh and Humbaba, chose in art specimens of the general Assyrian interpretation of hero *vs.* demon as prototypes for their own representations of Perseus fighting the Gorgon.

First of all, there must be considered the representation on a seal-cylinder from Cyprus¹ first published in 1898 and included tentatively in the Perseus-Gorgon group by Kuhnert in Roscher's *Lexicon* III, 2, p. 2032, fig. 5. The demon on this cylinder has long, upstanding hair, legs which end in the claws of a bird, apparently paws instead of hands, and a broad countenance depicted full face (Fig. 5). The creature has been forced to its knee but has not yet reached the falling position of the monster on the earlier Babylonian plaque. Just as in the Babylonian relief, the wrist of the raised right arm of the monster is grasped by its opponent. The antagonist on the Cyprian seal, however, in accordance with the Greek Gorgon tradition, turns his head to avoid the sight of the countenance. As one expects, this "Perseus" is armed with the Assyrian-Cyprian sickle or harpé. Ward² in his *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia* calls attention to the fact that on the cylinder the monster is not female and has neither the protruding tongue nor the wings of archaic Greek forms. He concludes, therefore, that it is more probably the figure of one of the giants, with whom Zeus fought. We may now say, at least, I believe, with the evidence of Opitz's relief and Thureau-Dangin's heads before us that the lack of wings and protruding tongue as well as the sex are due more to the stronger Assyrian tradition. It is perhaps worth noting that in the Cyprian presentation the spiral or S-curl beneath the chin is not portrayed but is replaced apparently by the outward



FIG. 5.—CYPRIAN CYLINDER

(Courtesy of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Vorderasiatische Abteilung V. A. 2145)

¹ *B.C.H.* XII, 1898, p. 452, fig. 4.

² W. H. Ward, *The Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, Washington, D. C. 1910, pp. 211-12.

curving locks of hair on either side of the cheeks. Is this perhaps in deference to the Greek tradition of a female Gorgon?

On the other hand, we are certainly on sure ground when with Ward we say that the cylinder represents a hero or god attacking an enemy and call that enemy giant or demon according to our interpretation of the claws on the legs and the monstrous



FIG. 6.—ASSYRIAN CYLINDER

(Courtesy of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Vorderasiatische Abteilung, 4215)

head. The representation as a whole clearly falls into that large Assyrian class portraying the death of a powerful enemy. One example of this common Assyrian type, a seal cylinder found in Assur,¹ will serve to show the general scheme and to link the Cyprian seal and Opitz's relief into this one large class. The enemy on this Assyrian cylinder has been forced to his knee (Fig. 6), in this case the right, by his two opponents. His arm beside the bent knee falls close to the ground in a position almost exactly the same as that of the Cyprian seal except that the hand in this case grasps the ankle of an opponent. The left forearm is not apparent but evidently there was a sharp bend at the elbow and the forearm was held vertical, for one may see the fingers of the hand on the elbow of his assailant. Legs are in profile, the upper body and head full front. The giant of the Assyrian cylinder is obviously not the same as the one represented on the Cyprian seal and Babylonian plaque, for the Assyrian is entirely human in body and head. That all three, however, fall into a very definite and distinct type in which the evil spirit or enemy is represented beaten down to one knee and about to be slain by the hero or god is obvious. Characteristic of this type is the representation of legs in profile, body and head full front. It is into this class that the representations of Perseus' struggle with the Gorgon fall.

The Gorgon from the western pediment at Corfu provides the most striking example of the similarity (Fig. 7). The demon has been forced to rest its weight on its right knee, its right arm falls down along the body, though not quite as far as in the Cyprian and Assyrian examples. The left upper arm like that of the Cyprian monster reaches forward with forearm raised sharply. Legs are in profile, body and head represented full front. As on the Cyprian seal



FIG. 7.—CORFU. GORGON FROM WESTERN PEDIMENT

FROM RICHTER, *Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, 1929, FIG. 76

(Courtesy of the Yale University Press)

¹ From the Vorderasiatische collection in Berlin, V. A., 4215.

the head is disproportionally large and like both Cyprian and Babylonian representations, unnaturally round. The Gorgon is clad in a garment exactly similar to that of the Babylonian relief except that it goes over the shoulders. A second illuminating example comes from a metope of Temple C at Selinus (Fig. 8). The Gorgon in this case has neither wings nor serpents. Perseus grasps the demon by the hair, a form of attack perhaps reminiscent of the long-haired monster on the Babylonian plaque. Behind Perseus stands Athena, evidently supporting the hero though taking no active part in the struggle, just as on the Babylonian plaque the little figure behind supports the heroes but does not himself attack. The Gorgon, like the Cyprian and Assyrian figures, is nude. This Gorgon from Selinus has both hands down, holding the new-born Pegasus. Its position, however, with one knee on the ground, the other advanced, legs in profile, upper body front, throws it at once into the category of the Assyrian-Babylonian type. Both the Selinus and Corfu sculptures are purely Greek, not Assyrian; both, however, are variations of the common Assyrian type.

The Greek type developed fast and the Greek artists introduced many innova-



FIG. 8.—PALERMO. PERSEUS CUTTING OFF THE HEAD OF MEDUSA, FROM METOPE C, SELINUS. AFTER RICHTER, *Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*.

(Courtesy of the Yale University Press)

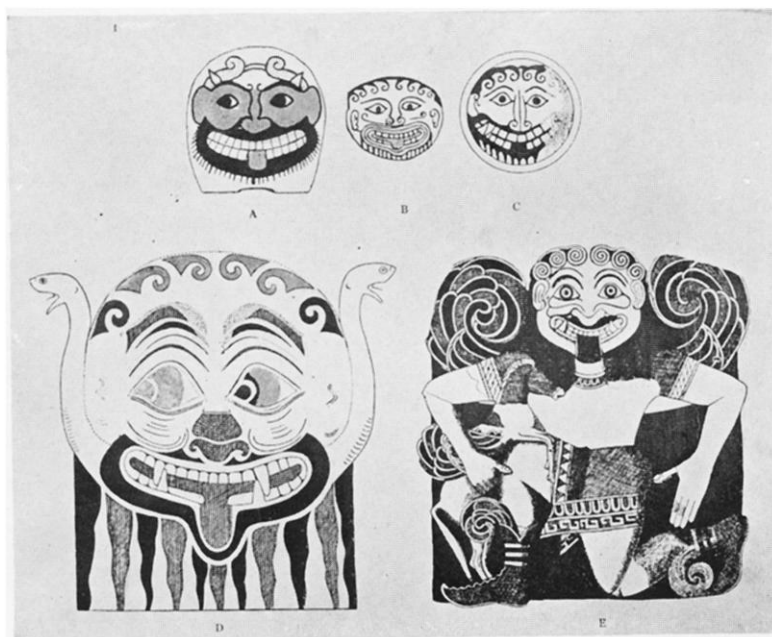


FIG. 9.—AFTER H. PAYNE, *Necrocorinthia*, 1931, P. 80, FIG. 23

(Courtesy of the Clarendon Press)

tions. The protruding tongue and the female sex are almost universal in the Greek types. In the Gorgon from Corfu are portrayed the serpents and the wings but not yet the tusks. These differences, in view of the wide variation introduced



FIG. 10.—GORGON HEAD FROM ATHENS

(G. Dickins, *Catalogue of the Acropolis Museum*, No. 701)

by Greek originality in figures of the sphinx, the chimæra, and the sea-beast, do not surprise us. What is astounding is the recurrence of certain Assyrian details in spite of the obviously Greek interpretations. In Payne's earliest head (Fig. 9, A of his illustration) the headdress is composed of the horns curving over the center of the forehead so common in the representation of Assyrian divinities. His second head (B) displays the wide lines of the rictus taken from Assyrian demon heads and the characteristic curls over the forehead. Both the cylinder from Assur and the Yale demon head portray the common style of Assyrian hair-dressing, a series of waves or curls ending on the forehead. The Greek painters representing the end of these curls introduced the succession of curls on the forehead. The curls running back over the top of the head are found painted on the running Gorgon from Corinth (Fig. 14). The sculptured head from Athens (Fig. 10) shows the style even more clearly, representing even the little squares into which the curls were divided. The interesting head with wild, upstanding hair of the male Gorgon from Sparta (Fig. 11) recalls the hair of the demon of the Cyprian seal and so the long-haired demon from Babylonia.

Parallels in the full length figure between Assyrian and Greek forms are equally striking both in respect to position and to dress.



FIG. 12.—ASSYRIAN CYLINDER (AFTER WARD, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, FIG. 642)

(Courtesy of the Carnegie Institution of Washington)

Ward (Fig. 12). As Ward remarks, the giant has fallen on one knee and rests his hands unresistingly on his hips. It is exactly this passive position which the Gorgon from Syracuse (Fig. 9, E) has taken, though here the Pegasos has been introduced under the right arm. The second style, harking back to the dress of the demon

head (Fig. 9, A of his illustration) the headdress is composed of the horns curving over the center of the forehead so common in the representation of Assyrian divinities. His second head (B) displays the wide lines of the rictus taken from Assyrian demon heads and the characteristic curls over the forehead. Both the cylinder from Assur and the Yale demon head portray the common style of Assyrian hair-dressing, a series of waves or curls ending on the forehead. The Greek painters representing the end of these curls introduced the succession of curls on the forehead. The curls running back over the top of the head are found painted on the running Gorgon from



FIG. 11.—HEAD FROM SPARTA

(A. Z. 1881, Taf. 17)

The Greek Gorgons as a rule wear a close fitting chiton with short arm

bands and skirt extending to just below the hips. Sometimes the skirt is divided, allowing the upper leg to protrude as in the figure from Syracuse (Fig. 9, E as seen in Payne's illustration); sometimes it is undivided as in the figure from Corfu (Fig. 7) and the running figure from Corinth (Fig. 14). Of the first type, very common in Assyrian art, an excellent example is found on a cylinder from Assur reproduced by

on Opitz's relief, is illustrated best perhaps by the figure on the lion base from Sindjirli (Fig. 13). As the photograph shows, the dress is short and caught at the waist by a girdle. A fringe or ornamented border adorns its hem. The Sindjirli base requires special attention, moreover, for the position of the arms, both raised with slight bend at the elbow, is just the position found in the running Gorgon from Corinth (Fig. 14). The perfect parallel between the position of the Corfu Gorgon and the demon on the Assyrian cylinder from Assur has already been pointed out. In art types, therefore, both of the Gorgon head alone and of the full figure, the dependence of the Greeks on the Assyrians is unmistakable.



FIG. 13.—AFTER E. MEYER, *Reich und Kultur der Chetiter*, FIG. 83

It is not inappropriate to mention here in contrast to these similarities in the Assyrio-Greek tradition the wide gap between this type and other foreign representations with which the Gorgon has been compared. One glance at the common portrayal of the Egyptian Bes (Fig. 15) will convince us that the similarities practically begin and end with the hideous face. Even in the countenance almost the only parallels are a tongue apparent, sometimes protruding, and extended ears.



FIG. 14.—RUNNING GORGON FROM CORINTH. AFTER PAYNE, *Necrocorinthia*, P. 82, FIG. 24

(Courtesy of the Clarendon Press)

There is no suggestion in the Bes story of a severed head or of slaying by god or hero. The Subarean-Hittite interpretation of the death of Humbaba is depicted on a curious relief from Tell Halaf.¹ The relief (Fig. 16) depicts the struggle of Gilgamesh and Enkidou as Baron von Oppenheim interprets it, but how different is the tradition here in the representation. One may almost say that the only point of similarity to the reliefs of Babylonian demons is the bandy legs of the creature; the only parallel with the Babylonian plaque, the attack by an enemy on either side. Neither of these two details has been accepted by the Greeks. The relief, however, is most useful, for it brings prom-

inently to view how popular was the story of the destruction of the demon and how widely the Hittite interpretation differed from the Babylonian-Assyrian. The attempt to find the origin of the Gorgon in the beautiful figures of the Egyptian goddess Hathor because she is represented full face, sometimes with head alone and

¹ Baron Max von Oppenheim, *Tell Halaf*, Leipzig, 1931, Pl. 36a.

connected with a decapitation story¹ is, I think, amply refuted by the remark of Payne that the earliest Greek examples in the Protocorinthian and early Corinthian art stand out from later examples by the far more powerful expression of the



FIG. 15.—FIGURES OF BES. AFTER W. ANDRAE, *Die Kunst des alten Orients*, P. 428
(Courtesy of the Propyläen-Verlag, Berlin)

original apotropaic idea.² Certainly the development would be reversed if the Hathor type were the original.

In the Assyrian-Babylonian representation of god or hero attacking demon or giant, one finds startling similarities to the Greek portrayals of Perseus attacking the Gorgon. In the other eastern art there are almost no resemblances. One may perhaps say with Payne that the Gorgon received through Greek artists an entirely individual character; one must strongly modify his statement that the origin of the Gorgon in eastern art is merely a possibility. I think we may confidently say that the full figure portrayal of the Gorgon, introduced into Greek art shortly after the middle of the seventh century, came over directly and with very slight modification from an Assyrian-Babylonian type of demon or giant. We have already seen that details of decoration, e.g. the rosette, changes in the representation of lions and horses came to Greek art from the Assyrian just at this time. To this list must now be added this kneeling, half front, half profile figure with round prominent head: a demon attacked and about to be killed by hero or god.

When this thesis is granted, a further most interesting question comes up; can one see in this artistic tradition an interpretation of the Gilgamesh-Humbaba story? It may be said at once that this problem can by no means be settled as yet. One may point out again that if one does not accept the Opitz plaque, there is no representation of the struggle of Humbaba and Gilgamesh in the purely Babylonian-Assyrian art to which we may refer with certainty. This does not mean that there were no such representations, but it suggests, at least, that they were very uncommon or that

original apotropaic idea.² Certainly the development would be reversed if the Hathor type were the original.

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FIG. 16.—DEATH OF DEMON (HUMBABA). AFTER FREIHERR VON OPPENHEIM, *Tell Halaf*, 180 B, PL. 36 A

(Courtesy of F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig)

¹ Raffaele Pettazzoni, "Le Origine della Testa di Medusa," *Bollettino d'Arte*, Serie II, 1921-22, pp. 491 ff.

² *B.S.A.*, XXVII, 1925-26, p. 130.

the story was represented by the more common types of struggles of god or hero against demon. In this connection it is well to remember that in Assyrian representations of figures of gods and figures of demons the differentiations between one and another in the same class was not always clearly defined. One may suggest, therefore, from the Assyrian side that in some of the representations, the popular Gilgamesh-Humbaba story was certainly in the mind of the artist.

From the Greek point of view one may only point to the imitation of this Assyrian hero-*vs.*-demon type in Greek art, recapitulate the similarities in story of the Perseus-Gorgon and the Gilgamesh-Humbaba traditions, and recall the fact that the story of the Gorgon-slaying comes into Greece just when the Gilgamesh story seems most popular in Assyria. The evidence from Homer that only the head was known in his time is just what we should expect in view of the wide popularity in art of Humbaba's head alone, compared with the rare examples of the battle scene. Humbaba's head was used as an apotropaic symbol and obviously we have the same employment of the Gorgon's head on the aegis of Athena and Zeus. In the reign of Ashurbanipal there were many copies of the Gilgamesh story in the royal library; just at that time Assyrian art for the first and only time powerfully affected Greek painting and sculpture; in this same period the story of the slaying of the Gorgon by Perseus appears full-grown in Greek legend. The dependence of the Greek story and the Greek art-types on Assyrian culture can scarcely be doubted; the solution of the question of just how they were linked together can confidently be left to future archaeological investigation.

The greatest difference between the Assyrian-Babylonian and the Greek demons is, I believe, the fact that the Greek monster is female, the Assyrian male. I do not believe it is quite sufficient merely to say with Furtwängler that the earliest Greek representations are male heads, for in Homer the Gorgon is already female, and even if we confine ourselves to the art-type we have no logical reason for the shift. It is well to remember, however, that if the head alone was prominent at first and that head sometimes represented with the raised line of the omen-masks it would have been perfectly possible for strangers to consider it a female head, especially for the Greeks for whom the name Humbaba or Hawawa would have had a feminine ending. Once the feminine tradition was established in Homer, the representations would be made to comply. It is only remarkable that under the circumstances we have the few Greek heads with beard, a rather strong indication that some powerful outside force presented a male tradition. In respect to this change from the male Humbaba to the female Gorgon a most curious fact comes to view which may perhaps suggest some cause in the development. Professor Harmon¹ calls attention to the fact that while in Lucian's time the hero of the shrine of the great Syrian goddess, Ata, was Kombabos, in Phrygia, Cybele is served by Attis. The connection between Attis and Ata is, he believes, indubitable and he suggests an analogous connection between Kombabos (Assyr. Humbaba, Babylonian, Hawawa), and *Κύβηβος* (Gallus), *Κυβήβη* (the goddess Cybele). We can scarcely as yet push this analogy very hard but if there was a connection in name between Humbaba and Cybele as between Attis and Ata, then it is not impossible to believe that Humbaba in the Syrian tradi-

¹ Loeb Series, Lucian Vol. IV, p. 378, note. 1.

tion could retain his function of demon but change his sex. His close connection with the great goddess in Syria may have fostered this tradition and a result may perhaps be seen in the famous Kamiros plate in which it is certainly the female goddess of Asia Minor who wears the Gorgon's head.

For the protruding tongue so general in early Greek presentations I know of no Assyrian parallels. Possibly the cleft between spiral curls suggested the feature; certainly it was introduced merely to increase the ugliness of the head. Very possibly the protruding tongue of Bes types was borrowed to adorn the head. It is certainly not true that all the features of the Greek Gorgon type or all the features of the Perseus-Gorgon story are derived from Assyrian sources. The curved wings and the snakes are both developed in Greek art, just as the glance of stone developed in Greek story. Probably the protruding tongue was the first contribution of the Greek genius. I think we may with safety assert, however, that very much more both in the artistic and the legendary tradition of the Perseus-Gorgon story is due to Assyrian influence than we have hitherto suspected.

Most interesting and important of all, one is able to allocate to a definite period and a definite place the transmission of certain elements of foreign legend into the Greek mythology. With such facts as a starting point we may be able to reach surer ground in the thorny subject of Greek mythological chronology and a still more satisfactory understanding of the strength and nature of outside forces which acted on the Greek genius.

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